

Water Safety Tips

Well folks, summer is here. And it is not a secret that the pool, the lake, and or river can look and sound very promising to cool yourself off. Looks may sometimes be deceiving, but not in this case. So before you go enjoy the summer by jumping in the backyard pool, tubing down the river or taking the boat and or jet ski out to the lake or the coast, here are some water safety tips for you to keep in mind.

General Water Safety Tips:

- **Learn to swim.** The best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around water is to learn to swim. Always swim with a buddy; never swim alone. (The American Red Cross has swimming courses for people of any age and swimming ability. To enroll in a swim course, contact your local Red Cross chapter.)
- **Swim in supervised areas only.** Floatation devices cannot replace adult supervision.
- **Obey all rules and posted signs.**
- **Watch out for the “dangerous too’s”** – too tired, too cold, too far from safety, too much sun, too much strenuous activity.
- **Don’t mix alcohol and swimming.** Alcohol impairs your judgment, balance, and coordination, affects your swimming and diving skills, and reduces your body’s ability to stay warm.
- **Pay attention to local weather conditions** and forecasts. Stop swimming at the first indication of bad weather.
- **Know** how to prevent, recognize and respond to emergencies.

Beach Safety:

- **Protect your skin.** Sunlight produces two kinds of UV rays – UVA increases the risk of skin cancer, skin aging, and other skin diseases. UVB causes sunburn and can lead to skin cancer. Limit the amount of direct sunlight you receive between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. and wear a sun screen with a sun protection factor containing a high rating such as 15.
- **Drink plenty of water regularly and often even if you do not feel thirsty.** Your body needs water to keep cool. Avoid drinks with alcohol in them. They can make you feel good briefly but make the heat’s effects on your body worse. *This is especially true with beer, which dehydrates the body.*
- **Watch for signs of heat stroke:** Heat stroke is life threatening. The victim’s temperature control system, which produces sweating to cool the body, stops working. The body temperature can rise so high that brain damage and death may result if the body is not cooled quickly. Signals include hot, red, and dry skin; changes in consciousness, rapid, weak pulse, and rapid, shallow breathing. Call 911 or your local EMS number. Move the person to a cooler place. Quickly cool the body by wrapping wet sheets or towels around the body and fan it. If you have ice packs or cold packs, place them on each of the victim’s wrists and ankles, in the armpits and on the neck to cool the large blood vessels. Watch for signals of breathing problems and make sure the airway is clear. Keep the person lying down.
- **Wear eye protection.** Sunglasses are like sunscreen for your eyes and protect against damage that can occur from UV rays. Be sure to wear sunglasses with labels that indicate that they absorb at least 90% of UV sunlight.
- **Wear foot protection.** Many times, people’s feet can get burned from the sand or cut from glass in the sand

Boating Safety:

- **Alcohol and boating don’t mix.** Alcohol impairs your judgment, balance, and coordination. Over fifty percent of drownings result from boating incidents involving alcohol.

- **For the same** reason it is dangerous to operate an automobile while under the influence of alcohol, people should not operate a boat while drinking alcohol.
- **Use Coast Guard approved life jackets** for you and your passengers when boating and fishing.
- **Develop a float plan.** Anytime you go out in a boat, give a responsible person details about where you will be and how long you will be gone. This is important because if the boat is delayed because of an emergency, becomes lost, or encounters other problems; you want help to be able to reach you.
- **Find a boating course in your area.** These courses teach about navigation rules, emergency procedures and the effects of wind, water conditions, and weather.
- **Watch the weather.** Know local weather conditions and prepare for electrical storms. Watch local news programs. Stop boating as soon as you see or hear a storm.

Home Pool Safety:

- **Never leave a child unobserved around water.** Your eyes must be on the child at all times. Adult supervision is a must.
- Install a phone by the pool or keep a cordless phone nearby so that you can call 911 in an emergency.
- **Learn CPR** and insist that babysitters, grandparents, and others who care for your child know CPR.
- **Post CPR** instructions and 911 or your local emergency number in the pool area.
- **Enclose the pool** completely with a self-locking, self-closing fence with vertical bars. Openings in the fence should not be more than four inches wide. If the house is part of the barrier, the doors leading from the house to the pool should remain locked and be protected with an alarm that produces sounds when the door is unexpectedly opened.
- **Never leave furniture** near the fence that would enable a child to climb over the fence.
- **Always keep basic lifesaving equipment** by the pool and know how to use it. Pole, rope, and personal flotation devices (PFDs) are recommended.
- **Keep toys away from the pool** when it is not in use.
- **Pool covers** should always be completely removed prior to pool use.
- **If a child is missing, check the pool first.** Go to the edge of the pool and scan the entire pool, bottom, and surface, as well as the surrounding pool area.

Safety at Lakes and Rivers:

- **Select a supervised area.** A trained lifeguard who can help in an emergency is the best safety factor. Even good swimmers can have an unexpected medical emergency in the water. **Never swim alone.**
- **Select an area** that is clean and well maintained. A clean bathhouse, clean restrooms, and a litter-free environment show the management's concern for your health and safety.
- **Select an area** that has good water quality and safe natural conditions. Murky water, hidden underwater objects, unexpected drop-offs, and aquatic plant life are hazards. Water pollution can cause health problems for swimmers. Strong tides, big waves, and currents can turn an event that began as fun into tragedy.
- **Make sure the water** is deep enough before entering headfirst. Too many swimmers are seriously injured every year by entering headfirst into water that is too shallow. A feet first entry is much safer than diving headfirst.
- **Be sure rafts and docks are in good condition.** A well run open-water facility maintains its rafts and docks in good condition, with no loose boards or exposed nails. Never swim under a raft or dock. Always look before jumping off a dock or raft to be sure no one is in the way.
- **Avoid drainage ditches and ravines.** Drainage ditches and ravines for water run-off are not good places for swimming or playing in the water. After heavy rains, they can quickly change into raging rivers that can easily take a human life.

Ocean Safety:

- **Stay within the designated swimming area,** ideally within the visibility of a lifeguard.

- **Stay away** from piers, pilings, and diving platforms when in the water.
- **Keep a lookout** for aquatic life. Water plants and animals may be dangerous. Avoid patches of plants and leave animals alone.
- **Make sure** you always have enough energy to swim back to shore.
- **Don't try to swim against a current if caught in one.** Swim gradually out of the current, by swimming across it.

Personal Watercraft (Jet Skis) Safety:

- **Know your local laws and regulations.** Some states have special laws governing the use of personal water craft (PWC) which address operations, registration and licensing requirements, education, required safety equipment and minimum ages.
- **Operate your PWC** with courtesy and common sense. Follow the traffic pattern of the waterway. Obey no wake and speed zones.
- **Use extreme caution around swimmers and surfers.** Run your PWC at a slow speed until the craft is away from shore, swimming areas and docks. Avoid passing close to other boats and jumping wakes. This behavior is dangerous and often illegal.
- **Coast Guard approved life jackets should be worn by the operator** of the PWC as well as any riders.
- **Ride with a buddy.** PWC's should always travel in groups of two or three. You never know when an emergency might occur.
- **Alcohol and operating a PWC doesn't mix.** Alcohol impairs your judgment, balance, and coordination. For the same reasons it is dangerous to operate an automobile, people should not operate a boat or PWC while drinking alcohol.

Tubing and Rafting Safety:

- **Always wear a Coast Guard approved life jacket.**
- **Do not overload the raft.**
- **Do not go rafting** or tubing after a heavy rain.
- **When tubing and rafting** with a tour company, make sure the guides are qualified. Check with the local chamber of commerce for listings of accredited tour guides and companies.
- **Know local weather conditions.** Make sure the water and weather conditions are safe. Water conducts electricity, stop swimming, boating, or any activities on the water as soon as you see or hear a storm. Also, heavy rains can make certain areas dangerous.

Waterparks:

- **Be sure the area is well supervised** by lifeguards before you or others in your group enter the water.
- **Read all posted signs.** Follow the rules and directions given by lifeguards. Ask questions if you are not sure about a correct procedure.
- **When you go** from one attraction to another, note that the water depth may be different and that the attraction could be used in a different way.
- **Before you start** down a water slide, get in the correct position – **face up and feet first.**
- **Some facilities provide life jackets at no charge.** If you cannot swim, wear a Coast Guard approved life jacket. Check others in your group as well.

Water Skiing Safety:

- **Wear a Coast Guard approved life jacket.**
- **Be sure** the boat and ski equipment are in good working condition.
- **Always turn the boat motor** completely off when you approach a fallen skier.
- **Watch the water** ahead of you at all times.
- **Have an extra** person aboard to watch and assist the skier.
- **Run parallel to shore and come in slowly when landing.**
- **Use proper hand signals to signal boat operator.**
- **Do not ski at night or in restricted areas.**

- **Know local weather conditions.** Make sure the water and weather conditions are safe. Water conducts electricity, so you should stop swimming, boating, or any activities on the water as soon as you see or hear a storm.